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524 177 Thonga boys are so fond of games that they even try to imitate those of the Europeans. In the accompanying illustration, they are seen sitting in two rows throwing some projectiles along the ground. I wondered what game this was, and was informed that these boys, having seen Portuguese officials playing billiards at the camp, had attempted to do the same, and this was the result!

C. THE AGE OF PUBERTY

I. *Circumcision rites.*

1) Spread and origin of circumcision amongst the Thongas.

857 As he grows up, the Thonga boy leaves the flock of goats and is entrusted with the care of the big cattle, oxen and cows, 881 when his father owns any. He becomes very proud, and tyran- 882 nises over his younger brothers; he calls himself their "hosi," 866 their chief, and sends them to work for him; in Maputju, big boys went so far as to scorn water brought from the pool by women, and only to use water specially fetched by small boys. If they grow so important in their own eyes, the reason is that special rites are performed on them during this period, rites which are calculated to give them great self-confidence. Amongst these rites, some have a direct relation with the sexual life and some represent only the entrance upon manhood. Let us begin with a study of circumcision, then we will take the other puberty rites and the habit of *gangisa*.

881 304 In a great many Bantu tribes, the age of puberty is marked by ceremonies of initiation, often accompanied by circumcision. There is little doubt that circumcision was practised throughout the Thonga tribes in former times. It is still current with those Thongas who emigrated into the Transvaal, and this is not a custom borrowed from the Pedi clans, which have all preserved circumcision. Though the Thongas often receive initiation in Pedi schools, in the Spelonken, they possess their own schools

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II. *The sexual and language taboos of the sungi.*

881 The whole sungi is taboo to every uninitiated person and especially to women. A woman who has seen the " shondlo ", viz. the leaves which the circumcised put over their wound, and which form their only clothing, must be killed. But taboos abound for everybody. The sexual taboos are most noteworthy. Sexual intercourse is strictly prohibited to all inmates, men as well as shepherds ; breaking this law would kill the circumcised. Therefore the men must not go home, or at least as seldom as possible, during these three months. Married people in the village may have sexual relations ; but there must be no noise, no quarrels between jealous co-wives ; because, if they insult each other and if this is known in the sungi, the shepherds will come one evening and plunder that village. Strange to say, in the meantime obscene language is permitted and even recommended— a contrast which we shall often meet with during the marginal periods. Some of the formulae contain expressions which are taboo at other times ; when the women bring the food to the sungi, the shepherds who receive it from their hands are allowed to address them with as many unchaste words as they like. The mothers themselves have the right of singing obscene songs when they pound the mealies for the sungi.

192 As regards language, there are also special expressions used during the school which are either archaic or foreign ; for instance, all orders are given in a tongue which is neither Thonga nor Sutho: Tshai goma, Go to the table ; Thari, Eat ; Khedi, Smear with white clay, etc. Often actions are not designated by the ordinary word, but by unusual terms. For instance, the daily smearing of the bodies with clay is called : " to eat sheep's fat. " To put on the leaves of the shondlo is " to eat sheep's flesh. " To be beaten with the mbuti sticks is " to drink goat's milk. " Evidently the aim of this terminology is to increase the impression of mystery which the rites must convey to the uninitiated.

866 As regards the rites of the marginal period, they are calculated to give the candidates the impression that they are new men,

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866/881 and that they must prove it by submitting manfully to all the trials of this hard and sometimes cruel initiation.

Every morning they smear their bodies with white clay. They are shining ; they have abandoned the darkness of childhood. When they have eaten their food they must pick up the crumbs which fall on the ground and throw them away in the pit near the fence, shouting some name in disdain, in an insulting manner, the name of one of the uncircumcised, of a *shuburu* (a term of contempt applied to boys before they pass through the school). This makes them realise their new position.

But the Ngoma " is the shield of buffalo's hide! It is the crocodile which bites ! " The candidates must accept all the hardships of initiation. They are taught to suffer.

III. *The trials.*

881 There are six main trials : blows, cold, thirst, unsavoury food, punishment, death.

Blows. On the slightest pretext, they are severely beaten by the shepherds at the order of the men of the sungi. Every day they must sit round the Elephant and, holding a stick in their hands, lunge at it as if to pierce it, for more than an hour. They sing the following words :

Elephant keep still !

Men and shepherds dance round them singing :

The black cow kicks ! It kicks against the jog of the baboon !

They themselves represent the black cow which the boys are trying to milk, and kick the boys ! In fact during this daily exercise round the Elephant—a rite which is considered as one of the most important of the Ngoma—, they beat the naked shoulders of the initiated as much as they like, not so as to bruise them, but quite enough to cause them pain.

When the boys do not eat quickly enough, they are beaten. Sometimes they are sent to catch certain birds of the size of sparrows which they must wrap in leaves, tying them in such